

FOOD IN CONNECTION WITH FESTIVITIES AND CEREMONIES

262 A discussion of food habits in Bang Chan would be im-
79 complete without some description of ceremonies (l'ngaan)¹
which dominate the village scene during the dry, post-harvest
season. These events are of interest in connection with food
habits because of 1) the prominent place that food occupies
in them, 2) the cultural significance and relatively large
cost, both of which must be taken into account in any plans
for dietary improvement and 3) the possible influence of
differences in food habits at the ceremonial season and of
problems of sanitation incident to large-scale food prepara-
tion on the nutrition and health of village residents.

736 The season for ceremonies and festivities opened with
the harvest rites to the Rice Goddess and closed with the be-
ginning of Buddhist Lent in mid-July. The big occasions were
creations, ordinations into the Buddhist priesthood, weddings,
and rites for cutting of the topknot² or homage-to-the-
327 teacher.³ Smaller family celebrations might mark such events
as the raising and dedicating of a house, the return of a son
from the army, or even public events such as the completion
274 of a road or a bridge. Whatever the focal activity, a gala
meal was served first to priests and then to guests.

600 Offering food to priests brought merit, which ensured
happiness in later rebirths (see p. 9). Because the greater
the number of priests served, the greater the merit, people
were spurred to put on as large an affair as they could
154 afford. Moreover, a person was judged throughout the commu-
nity by the abundance and quality of the food served daily and
at festivities. Thus, there was reason to make a (l'ngaan
87 as opulent as possible, but celebrations of every degree
occurred in Bang Chan, from lavish feasts to simple cere-
monies.

894 1. Significantly the same Thai word is used for work
and for ceremony.

303 2. Topknots, formerly worn by all Thai children, used
55 to be cut ritually at the time of puberty. In Bang Chan, the
154 growing of a topknot had become primarily an attempt to im-
prove a child's health. Few school age children wore top-
knots. They were usually cut earlier than puberty.

875 3. A person who had received specialized knowledge
from a teacher gave thanks annually in a ceremony, to which
those who had profited by this knowledge were obliged to
come and/or contribute. Thus, all the patients of a tradi-
tional medical practitioner helped him to honor his teacher.